

SPORTS

Iran soccer players honor alleged child victims of the war before World Cup warmup



1 of 5 | Iran's players sing the national anthem, holding pictures of children allegedly killed in U.S. and Israel strikes in Iran, before a friendly soccer match between Iran and Costa Rica, in Antalya, southern Turkey, Tuesday, March 31, 2026. (AP Photo/Riza Ozel)

Updated 11:28 AM EDT, March 31, 2026

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ANTALYA, Turkey (AP) — Iran soccer players and officials posed with pictures of children allegedly killed by U.S. and Israeli airstrikes before their World Cup warmup against Costa Rica on Tuesday.

There were no spectators at the stadium in Antalya but FIFA President [Gianni Infantino](#) was present.

The Iran players were joined by coach Amir Ghalenoei, Iran Football Federation vice president Mehdi Mohammad Nabi and staff members, holding the photographs while singing the national anthem.

Iran won the match 5-0.

The players' gesture came after they [held small backpacks](#) on Friday before another warmup against Nigeria, to honor the victims of a deadly missile strike on an elementary school in southern Iran. More than 165 people were killed, most of them children, in the Feb. 28 strike [likely launched by the U.S.](#)

Neither the United States nor Israel has accepted responsibility for the attack which has been widely criticized by the United Nations and human rights groups. The U.S. military is investigating and has said it would never target civilians.

Iranian government and soccer officials have said they do not want to boycott the World Cup being co-hosted by the U.S., Canada and Mexico in June, but that it was not possible for the national team to go to the U.S. because of the war started by the U.S. and Israel.

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Infantino has dampened Iran attempts to move its matches, saying FIFA wants its tournament “to go ahead as scheduled.”

AP soccer: <https://apnews.com/hub/soccer>

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